David Copp, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 665. 0-19-514779-0. $74.00 (Hb).

The *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* contains twenty-two chapters written by distinguished scholars. The *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* is divided into two parts: meta-ethics and normative ethical theory. The editor, David Copp, draws the distinction between meta-ethics and normative ethical theory as follows: the proponents of normative ethical theories, such as deontology and consequentialism, make claims regarding the kind of things that are good and bad, and the sorts of actions that are right and wrong. Whether a person is a deontologist or a consequentialist will have direct implications for what she thinks of moral issues such as abortion or the death penalty. Meta-ethical theories are at a second order with respect to moral claims. Their proponents raise issues about the status of first order moral statements such as whether they are true, or whether they are statements of facts.

The authors of each of the chapters in the *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* present a view of a particular field of ethical theory. The meta-ethical theories and topics covered in the *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* are: moral realism; theological voluntarism; naturalism; nonnaturalism; expressivism; projectivism; sentimentalism; relativism; nihilism; Kantian meta-ethics; Humean meta-ethics; the relevance of biology for ethics; and the relationship that holds between freedom of the will and moral responsibility. The normative ethical theories discussed in the *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* are: consequentialism; deontology; virtue ethics; the ethics of care; particularism; and Kantian ethical theory. Topics in normative ethical theory discussed include value theory, rights, moral intuitions, and moral reasoning and practice. There is

no part of the *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* that specifically addresses the history of either meta-ethics or normative ethical theory. The views of major figures in the history of ethics, such as Aristotle and Kant, are discussed in chapters on the contemporary descendents of their theories, and the major arguments and views of such figures are considered to the degree that they are relevant to current debates. Plato's views, for example, are discussed primarily owing to the relevance of the Euthyphro problem for divine command theories of morality.

In his introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, Copp presents a framework for understanding the relation among the major theories in meta-ethics and normative ethical theory, such as the disputes among consequentialists and deontologists and realists and antirealists, in a way that helps us understand the debates in the text. Copp attempts to give terms such as 'deontologism' and 'realism' a clearer definition than is often given in the philosophical literature. Copp also offers a critical assessment of some of the major points raised by the contributors to the *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, and we would be well served to read its chapters in conjunction with Copp's discussions of them in his introduction. The detail and depth of Copp's discussion varies from chapter to chapter. For example, he offers only a brief discussion of the chapter on particularism whereas he discusses the chapter on the related topic of deontology in some detail. Given how insightful Copp's assessments are, we might have benefited from separate introductions to each of the chapters.

The author of each chapter makes the case for a particular view, for or against a metaethical or ethical theory. The contributors to the *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* take a variety of approaches to making their points: some map out the conceptual

terrain surrounding a particular issue; some focus on the positive arguments in favor of a particular theory; others are concerned primarily with answering objections to a theory; while others are primarily concerned with the issue of how, if at all, one theory presents a distinct alternative to another prominent theory. To acquire a sense of the approach taken by contributors to their task, we may focus on a representative chapter, the chapter on "Antirealist Expressivism and Quasi-Realism" by Simon Blackburn. Blackburn opens his chapter by sketching out the history of ethical theories grounded in the expression of moral sentiments. Expressivism is traced back to David Hume. No mention is made of Francis Hutcheson, whose views are nicely summarized along with Hume's in Michael Slote's related chapter on "Moral Sentimentalism and Moral Psychology." In Blackburn's view, A.J. Ayer and Charles Stevenson revived the Humean approach to morality in reaction to the implausible intuitionistic platonism of G.E. Moore. Blackburn then distinguishes his expressivist view, the view that moral claims serve to express complex attitudes, from subjectivism, the view that moral claims are descriptions of a speaker's attitudes. Blackburn outlines the error theory of J.L. Mackie, and notes how his expressivism differs from Mackie's theory. The widely discussed Frege-Geach argument presents perhaps the most serious concern for a theory such as Blackburn's. As Peter Geach pointed out, expressivism threatens to turn apparently valid arguments into fallacies of equivocation. The attempts Blackburn and his fellow expressivist Allan Gibbard have made at solving the problem are presented briefly. Blackburn concludes his chapter by noting the alternatives to an expressivist theory, theories that are Aristotelian, Kantian, or naturalistic. He then offers some reasons to think that such apparent alternatives are more consistent with expressivism than is often thought. While

the points made in the chapter will not surprise a reader of Blackburn's work, it is helpful

to have the arguments for and against expressivism presented in a concise and elegant

fashion.

As does Blackburn, the contributors to the *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*

generally aim to convince us that a certain theory or approach to ethics is correct. At

times, the polemical character of the chapters detracts from the usefulness of the *Oxford*

Handbook of Ethical Theory as a reference work. The contributors to the volume do

always not present a complete survey of the relevant arguments on each topic. For

example, in his chapter on moral naturalism, Nicholas Sturgeon makes a case for

attributing causal efficacy to moral properties without an account of Gilbert Harman's

well-known arguments against attributing such a role to such properties. Moreover,

Geoffrey Sayre McCord raises the concern that deflationary theories of truth make it

impossible to draw a distinction between meta-ethical realism and antirealism without

mention of the deflationary responses to this concern, or citation of the considerable

literature that such responses have generated. Phillip Kitcher, in his chapter on the

relevance of biology to ethics, gives only brief consideration to previous attempts to base

ethics on evolutionary considerations. Kitcher writes that Allan Gibbard's account of

evolution and cooperation in *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* is flawed insofar as, for

Gibbard, "the moral philosophy comes first, and the biological materials enter as they are

taken to be relevant" (p. 165). Such criticism of Gibbard's account of evolution and

cooperation is, unfortunately, stated without further elaboration. Notwithstanding such

omissions, the contributors to the volume cover a great deal of philosophical work in

their accounts of the arguments and counterarguments relevant to each topic.

The *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* will be useful for scholars specializing in ethics, as it contains a number of original and interesting contributions to current debates in meta-ethics and normative ethics. It will be especially helpful to graduate students in philosophy, as it is a fine resource for research on particular topics in ethical theory. The chapters could also be used as readings for advanced undergraduate ethics courses, to give students a sense of current work in philosophical ethics.

Fritz J. McDonald

State University of New York at New Paltz

Philosophy Department

Jacobson Faculty Tower 916

1 Hawk Drive

New Paltz, NY 12561

U. S. A.